**WITH JESUS** (Week 8, February 28, 2018)

**Getting to Know Jesus Through the Gospel of John**

**John 11:1-16**

**Background for the Passage**

1. The story of Lazarus in John 11 is considered by John to be the turning point of the ministry of Jesus. This is the ultimate example of the power of Jesus to give life, the greatest miracle possible to do, and a picture of His own coming resurrection from the dead. And as all the signs and miracles in this gospel, it brought glory to God and confirmed clearly that Jesus was the Son of God.

2. “A man named Lazarus” (11:1) is a strange way to introduce a good friend of Jesus, and does little to provide the background. Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary were not only followers of Jesus, but good friends as well. They lived just a few miles outside of Jerusalem, so Jesus may have stayed with them when He spent time in the Holy city. Bethany was a village about 2 miles from Jerusalem, so Jesus may have enjoyed the hospitality of these three friends upon several occasions. Lazarus was well-known and respected in his community, so he may have been able to connect Jesus to many influential people who were seeking the truth.

3. Interestingly, (or just to confuse the reader unaware of Biblical geography,) at the beginning of chapter 11, Jesus is located near the town of Bethany, but the one across the Jordan river, not the village near Jerusalem where Lazarus, Martha, and Mary live. (Jn. 10:40, 1:28) So Jesus and His disciples received a message from Martha and Mary in Bethany, while they are near the town of Bethany, but the two villages are about a day’s journey apart. (The events described in Luke 13:22-17:10 occurred between the end of John 10 and John 11:1, in case you’d like to check it out.)

4. John unconcerned with chronology or building up the element of suspense in a story identifies Mary not only as the sister of Lazarus, but as the woman who lovingly poured expensive perfume on Jesus’ head to annoint Him. (12:1-7) This event would have been known in the first century by believers as it was a treasured and significant event in the last weeks of Jesus’ ministry. (Mt. 26:6-13, Mk. 14:3-9)

5. When Lazarus became very ill, his concerned sisters sent a message to Jesus to alert Him. Jesus had healed the sick before, and those miracles had been done for mostly strangers. Even though Jesus was a day’s journey away, they probably had a reasonable expectation that Jesus would come quickly in order to help His friend Lazarus.

6. When Jesus heard of Lazarus’s sickness, He knew that it would lead to death. But He also knew that the death of Lazarus would lead to the Glory of God being revealed once again in and through Him. The words of Jesus to His disciples, “this sickness will not end in death,” predicted that though Lazarus would die physically, he would not remain dead. The story was set to have an unexpected ending as the Son of God would again reveal His Divine Glory by resurrecting Lazarus from the dead.

7. The statement that Jesus loved Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (11:5) affirmed that Jesus loved every member of the family. It wasn’t a lack of love that prevented Him from going immediately to the bedside of Lazarus, nor a distrust of Martha or Mary. Jesus waited because He wanted them to experience a miracle that would bring great glory to the Son of God, to God the Father, and to the Spirit that empowered the resurrection. It would also be an incredibly joyful event for everyone involved, and would wipe away the painful memories of the death of Lazarus.

8. God the Father is in charge of all timing. Jesus was not pressured into acting urgently, as He trusted the will and the timing of God the Father. (This is much, much more difficult for us to do, ay?) When Jesus heard that Lazarus was gravely ill, He stayed in place for two more days. Jesus would not be forced into action by even His closest friends, as the timing of God is perfect and right, even if we don’t understand.

9. Lazarus had been dead for 4 days by the time Jesus arrived in Bethany. (11:39) The messengers would have taken 1 day to travel from Bethany to where Jesus was located, Jesus waited 2 days before starting the trip, and the journey would have taken an entire day. Thus, Lazarus probably died shortly after the messengers left Bethany to go to Jesus. Jesus probably did not even receive the message until after Lazarus was already dead. It would have been physically impossible for Jesus to arrive in Bethany in time to prevent the death of Lazarus.

10. The disciples couldn’t understand why Jesus would want to go back into Judea again. (11:7-10) The last time that He had been there, a mob of angry people had tried to stone him. The disciples were confused, as where they had been ministering with Jesus seemed to be a good place, and no one was threatening them or Jesus.

11. In response to their anxiety and confusion, Jesus again turned to a metaphor about light and darkness to explain God’s perspective/timing. The disciples’ fears related to the limited scope of human perspective. The disciples were concerned about what the Jewish leaders might do, and what could be accomplished by human efforts for evil. They were anxious about a specific place, a time period, a limited group of Jewish leaders, and the possible limited actions available to hurt the physical bodies of both Jesus and themselves. Jesus tried to redirect their attention to the unlimited scope of the Divine perspective, where God is in control and all will work out according to the plans/will of the Father. (As Jesus continued to obey His Father, He knew that the metaphorical 12 hours of daylight where His work could be done might be drawing to a close, as the time of darkness was approaching. But, nothing could be permitted to sidetrack Him from His mission.)

12. When Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus had fallen “asleep,” only He knew the true meaning of that term. Jesus would soon need to clarify and the disciples would soon understand by being there that Lazarus was dead. But only Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or those saved by Jesus can truly refer to death as sleep. By limited human understanding and from human perspective, death is painfully final. Only from Gods perspective is death but a doorway, a temporary transition, and a passage to a much brighter eternal life.

13. Resurrection from the dead is a key part of Christian belief. Jesus not only was raised from the dead, but also had/has the power to raise others. Jesus had made this point very clear to His disciples and demonstrated that power, but they still did not understand. (John. 5:21, 6:40, 6:54, 8:51, 10:17-18, 10:27-28)

14. Thomas has been known in Church tradition as ”Doubting Thomas,” but in 11:16, Tom is demonstrating courage and fearlessness, not doubt. Thomas was a faithful follower, and though he did not understand why Jesus was returning to Judea, he was willing to die in defense of His Lord.

**Review Questions**

15. (11:1-2) Where were Jesus and His disciples at this point? What’s surprising about the way John introduces Lazarus? What’s the issue for Lazarus? How does John introduce the sisters of Lazarus? Why does John mention in 11:2 what he will describe in detail in 12:1-7?

16. (11:3) What is demonstrated by the two sisters sending a message requesting help to Jesus? How would they have sent this message? What is indicated by the way that they addressed Jesus? How did they describe Lazarus?

17. (11:4) How did Jesus respond when he got the message about Lazarus? What was His reasoning? What will be the primary and secondary results of Lazarus’ sickness?

18. (11:5-7) Why did John affirm the close friendship and love between Jesus and the three siblings? What surprising action did Jesus take in response to that love? How is this action loving and not cruel? So where was Jesus again, and where was he going again? (11:6-7) Why is geography vital to understanding this passage?

19. 11:8) How did the disciples respond to Jesus decision to go to Bethany in Judea, which was located just 2 miles from Jerusalem? How did they address Him? Why were they objecting? What was the logical reason for objecting?

20. (11:9-10) How did Jesus respond to their objections? Why did He not reply directly? What metaphor does Jesus use to teach a greater point? How does perspective impact everything? What overall point is Jesus making?

21. (11:11-13) What declaration does Jesus make about the condition of Lazarus? What plan does Jesus announce? What does He mean by the term “sleep,” and why is Jesus one of the few who can rightfully use this term? How do the disciples misunderstand?

22. (11:14-15) What did Jesus tell them? What reality did this fact bring to them all? Why is Jesus “glad” that He wasn’t there earlier? Who will benefit from this situation? What’s startling about Jesus statement to “come & see him?”

23. (11:16) Who responded with clueless courage? Why did Thomas respond like that? What does his response indicate?

**So What**

\*24. Like Martha & Mary… Have you ever sent a semi-urgent message” (prayer) to God and seemingly heard nothing back? Have you ever felt as if the message got lost in the mail? How does that feel?

\*25. How & why is Jesus waiting for 2 days a loving action? Why did He wait? What’s the problem with perception? What’s required of us in similar situations?

26. How do we think of death? Jesus referred to it as sleep, along with other NT authors. But how is that terminology tough for us?